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The Eastern Partnership: civil society in between the European and domestic level: the case of Georgia

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This article applies a governance-based framework to produce a more nuanced view on the democracy promotion efforts of the European Union (EU) within the Eastern Partnership (EaP) and to trace less direct avenues of EU impact on democratisation. The central claim is that the EaP offers democracy-promoting actors such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) opportunities for empowerment, thus altering the existing opportunity structure. To verify this claim, this article focuses on the case of Georgia and how NGOs there have made use of EaP-related opportunities based on qualitative data acquired during several research visits. The EaP appears to have indeed moved away incrementally from a traditional bilateral framework to a network mode of governance, allowing NGOs to become acknowledged partners and creating opportunities for them. This research uncovers a number of initiatives from within Georgian civil society to attempt to make use of these opportunities. However, the eventual impact has been heavily limited by existing internal relations between NGOs and Georgian government and the EU is unable to exert enough pressure to change this domestic deadlock.

Keywords: civil society assistance; Eastern Partnership; Georgia; democratisation; governance

Introduction

Since 2004, relations between the European Union (EU) and Georgia are part of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) which led to intensified relations between both parties and a raised presence of the EU within Georgia. One of the main goals of the ENP is to support democracy throughout its neighbourhood. The Georgian government simultaneously openly proclaimed to pursue a democratic agenda. The combination of these two actors pursuing the same democratisation agenda would be expected to lead to successful cooperation on the matter. The political evolution since the Rose Revolution has not been unambiguously positive regarding democratisation, with commentators and analysts questioning the tendencies towards a strong presidential system and the dominance of the ruling party within parliament (Broers 2005; Lansky and Arashidze 2008). Initial assessments of the impact of the ENP in the neighbourhood were generally negative and started from a comparison with the earlier policy of enlargement (Smith 2005; Kelly 2006). This pessimistic verdict compared to the success of enlargement may indeed be the case, but in this article I argue that the EU may have a more diffuse and subtle impact on civil society development.

The EU attempted to address this criticism by introducing the Eastern Partnership (EaP) in 2008. One of the goals of this policy was to steadily increase and institutionalise ties with

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non-governmental organisations (NGOs) from the EU's Eastern neighbours. A dedicated Civil Society Forum (CSF) was set up to bring together civil society actors from within the EU and the six EaP countries, officially acknowledging the role of civil society within the EaP framework. The CSF is a totally new instrument and is still very much a work in progress, which makes it hard to assess its impact or success. Opinions on the exact role of the CSF and which policies it should undertake vary greatly both within EU institutions and within civil society. This touches upon the broader debate on international support for civil society. The resistance against external support for NGOs has been growing amongst authoritarian regimes such as Russia and Egypt. Laws specifically targeting donor financing for NGOs have been used to severely curtail the room for manoeuvre for externally financed NGOs (President of Russia 2012; Radio Free Europe 2012). Moreover, the EaP covers a region that has been affected by the so-called colour revolutions,¹ where any direct or indirect link between domestic and international actors is prone to attract scrutiny and criticism (Herd 2005; Wilson 2010). Taken together, the CSF and the EU's policies in general are relatively new phenomena, offering new insights into the ongoing debate about the role of external support for civil society.

This article aims to contribute to this debate by putting NGOs in a wider political and societal framework. Civil society organisations are situated in a broad network of relations with different official, societal and international actors. In order to accurately examine the role of civil society in democratisation, this institutional embeddedness needs to be taken into account. In this article, the triadic relations between government, civil society and international actors are studied together to overcome the unsophisticated dichotomy between domestic and international prevalence when assessing democratisation. The EaP may not be a typical case of direct support for NGOs in a comprehensive framework of democratisation support, but it still offers a possible avenue for NGOs to get their voice heard, intensify networks, or gather knowledge and support. The establishment of the CSF has created opportunities for Georgian NGOs and thus indirectly affects the development of civil society and the relations it has with Georgian government.

Background

Georgian government has put democratisation and Euro-Atlantic integration at the top of its priorities since the Rose Revolution. The institutionalised frameworks of the ENP and EaP make an in-depth enquiry into relations between civil society, government and the EU feasible. In order to analyse how NGOs make use of the opportunities the new forms of EU governance offers them, this article starts with an overview of the policy frameworks and how these were developed. After all, Georgia is separated from the closest external border of the EU by about 900 km,² which makes it an unlikely member of a policy concerning the EU's immediate neighbours. This makes the question how the EU came to having any policy at all in the region even more intriguing.

Georgia: politics and civil society

Post-communist civil society is characterised as relatively weak compared to other regions, precisely because of the specific nature of the communist political project (Howard 2002). Not only was there no room for independent pluralist organisations; the state actively supplanted civil society with state-controlled organisations. This led to limited and formal engagement, the dominance of personal and informal networks, and a general mistrust towards associative organisations. This typical post-communist heritage was further exacerbated in the Georgian case. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Georgia witnessed the emergence of virulent nationalism and ethnic conflict. In this context, the only kind of civil society that developed was of a

rather vicious kind, such as organised crime, the black market or paramilitary groups. These took over the void left behind by the failing state Georgia had become under President Gamsakhurdia immediately after independence (Companjen 2010, 13).

Under the presidency of Shevardnadze, however, civil society in Georgia went through a remarkable and quick transformation. International experts and activists hailed Georgia as having the most vibrant civil society sector in the Caucasus and Central Asian region (Broers 2005). How did this happen? The first turbulent years of Georgian independence could be considered to be a blessing in disguise for civil society. The existing soviet apparatus was swept away and the new state structures were too weak to take up all expected tasks. This opened up an autonomous space for non-state actors who had more room to manoeuvre than in other post-soviet countries. Shevardnadze relied heavily on foreign support in order to remain in power, and his proclaimed adherence to European norms and values ruled out a crackdown on civil society. The regime used a vibrant civil society to demonstrate its democratic credentials to facilitate receiving further international aid.

This international support fostered the creation of a new Anglophone and professional class of NGO workers, pushing away traditional voices such as the intelligentsia and politicians. Civil society actors increasingly voiced their criticism about Shevardnadze's rule, leading to polarised relations between the government on one side, and civil society and the opposition on the other (Muskhelishvili and Jorjoliani 2009). In the lead-up to the Rose Revolution of 2003, the line between civil and political society became blurred when NGOs, media and opposition parties jointly challenged the government. Once Shevardnadze was ousted, the new government under Saakashvili recruited extensively amongst civil society actors.

The role and success of international support given to Georgian civil society have been widely discussed and researched. Critics interpret it as a foreign-dominated, mostly US, regime change (World Movement for Democracy and the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law 2008) that showed how NGOs are being used by foreign agents under the guise of democratisation. This view has found support amongst authoritarian regimes such as Russia, Iran, or Venezuela, where civil society has been severely curtailed based on the lessons learned from Georgia and the other colour revolutions (Ambrosio 2009; Polese and Ó Beacháin 2011).

EU: developing policies

Before the Rose Revolution, most international support for Georgian NGOs originated from Western organisations and foundations with US programmes playing the most important role (Ó Beacháin 2009). After 2003, the EU gradually increased its support to Georgian civil society organisations, strengthening the ties between the EU and Georgia. Immediately following Georgia's independence in 1991, the EU perceived the South Caucasus as a conflict-prone region; the worst-case scenario of erupting ethnic violence and failing states in the wake of the dissolution of the Soviet Union appeared to become a reality. Relations between Georgia and the EU focused on humanitarian help, conflict management, and nuclear safety, and did not incorporate a long-term coherent approach to an actual policy for the country or the region (Mayer 2005). EU–Georgia relations did not acquire an institutionalised format until 1996, when the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) was signed. The PCA is the legal basis for relations between the EU and Georgia since 1999 and is still in place today. Besides trade, investment, economic, legislative, and cultural cooperation, the agreement also covers political dialogue and a dedicated title on cooperation on matters relating to democracy and human rights (European Community 1996). However, it does not explicitly mention civil society support or democracy promotion. This was partly mitigated by the introduction of the European Initiative (changed to “European Instrument” in 2006) for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) in 1999 which

grouped together budget headings for the promotion of human rights, democratisation, and conflict prevention, which generally have to be implemented in partnership with NGOs and international organisations (European Commission 2011). This thematic budget line is not geographically restricted and is not linked to the PCA in any way, making it more difficult for the EU to formulate a coherent policy towards Georgia which would allow fitting in civil society assistance in the broader framework of EU – Georgia relations.

Despite this institutionalisation and tightening of ties between Georgia and the EU in the late 1990s, the EU remained a low-profile actor in the region. During this period, the EU's main external policy concern was the accession process of 10 prospective member states which would entail a principally Eastward enlargement. Confronted with this new geographic reality, the EU needed an answer on how to deal with its new neighbours. The EU's response to this challenge is the ENP which aimed to avoid creating new dividing lines and offer political association and deeper economic integration, increased mobility, and more people-to-people contacts (European Commission 2004) without offering the countries concerned membership perspectives. Initially, the three South Caucasian countries were not part of the ENP; the three countries were included in the policy only when the EU was confronted with the events of the Rose Revolution in Georgia. The ENP closely mimicked the institutional set-up of the accession process. A country report lays the foundation and lists the different problems and challenges the country faces. Based on this, an Action Plan is drafted that summarises the priorities for action across various policy areas. The first priority area is strengthening rule of law, democratic institutions, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Despite this being the number one priority area, civil society support, or promotion is not part of the Action Plan. The only instance where civil society is mentioned is in the possibility to support the involvement of civil society in certain functional policies such as conflict resolution or monitoring the implementation of environmental policy (European Commission 2006b). The actual implementation of the Action Plan is monitored through yearly Progress Reports. This process only had two major stakeholders, the EU and Georgian government, and civil society organisations were not included as partner or in a watchdog or monitoring function.

This was one of the points of criticism being voiced about the ENP which led to an increasing call for an upgraded or extended policy towards the region. In 2009, the EaP was introduced to reinvigorate the relations between the EU and the six former Soviet Union republics in the East.³ Financial backing was increased and a number of demands from the Eastern partners, such as visa regulations and trade integration, were included (European Commission 2008). In addition to the already existing bilateral relations between the EU and the national governments of the six Eastern partners, a multilateral component was created. This twin-track solution makes it possible to formulate an individual approach for each country while at the same time developing a coherent regional approach spanning all six countries (Gromadzki 2010). A second innovation is the explicit incorporation of civil society into the EaP's policies and institutions. Through the creation of a dedicated CSF and National Platforms (NPs), civil society organisations acquire the possibility to formulate input and to conduct monitoring activities.

Alongside civil society, dedicated multilateral institutions for members of parliaments (EURONEST) and for regional and local politicians (CORLEAP) have been set up. Recent policy documents setting out the priorities for 2012–2013 have set out explicit targets for civil society organisations and other non-governmental institutions (European Commission and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security 2012). This shows that the EU is continuing this trend towards moving away from government-dominated relations. Table 1 provides an overview of the gradual expansion and institutionalisation of the relations between the EU and its six Eastern neighbours and the underlying trends. What is most striking is the double shift towards multilateralism and the wider scope of actors involved under the EaP. This shows that the EaP

clearly steps away from mere bilateral EU – government relations and is truly developing into the direction of a multi-actor constellation, a case in point of the EU’s system of governance.

This condensed historical background on Georgian civil society and the development of the EU’s policies towards the region illustrates the increasing ties between civil society and government within the Georgian domestic domain, Georgian government, and the EU, and the EU and civil society organisations. It is quite clear that transformations concerning one of these actors have impact on the others. An example of this is the importance of NGOs in organising the protests against the Shevardnadze regime and subsequently the number of people formerly active in NGOs who have moved to government under Saakashvili. Another example is the fact that the Rose Revolution, an event at the domestic level, managed to attract the attention of policy-makers within the EU and led to the inclusion of the South Caucasus into the ENP. This strengthens the assumption that over the last years Georgia has been increasingly drawn into the mode of governance of the EU. This form of external governance also has impact on the institutional environment in which civil society organisations are active. The following section specifically delves deeper into how the introduction of the EaP has opened up opportunities for civil society organisations and consequently whether or not the EaP has led to indirect democracy assistance.

Framework for analysis

During the early nineties the “discovery” of civil society organisations as actors for democratic change led to increased funding for civil society support. This fitted the (neo-)liberal thinking at the time: checking the power of the state and holding governing elites to account in combination with being relatively cost-effective. It was also a less controversial way of influencing local politics, bypassing local elites without directly interfering with governments. The question raised by critics of this liberal approach is whether normative democratic notions of civil society

Table 1. Institutional set-up of EU – Georgia relations.

	Format	Meetings	Actors
1992–1998 pre-PCA			
Interparliamentary meetings	Bilateral	Yearly	Parliament
1999–2006 PCA			
Parliamentary Cooperation Committee	Bilateral	Yearly	Parliament
Cooperation Council	Bilateral	Yearly	Executive
Cooperation Committee	Bilateral	Yearly	Civil servant
2007–2008 ENP			
Parliamentary Cooperation Committee	Bilateral	Yearly	Parliament
Cooperation Council	Bilateral	Yearly	Executive
Cooperation Committee	Bilateral	Yearly	Civil servant
Functional subcommittees	Bilateral	Ad hoc	Civil servant
2009–2012 EaP			
Parliamentary Cooperation Committee	Bilateral	Yearly	Parliament
Cooperation Council	Bilateral	Yearly	Executive
Cooperation Committee	Bilateral	Yearly	Civil servant
Functional subcommittees	Bilateral	Ad hoc	Civil servant
EaP ministerial meeting	Multilateral	Yearly	Executive
EaP thematic platform panels	Multilateral	Biyearly	Civil servant
EURONEST	Multilateral	Yearly	Parliament
CORLEAP	Multilateral	Yearly	Local and regional
CSF	Multilateral	Yearly	Civil society

can be equated with donor-dependent NGOs, or whether the organisations that donors support reflect the realities of civil society in established Western democracies (Fagan 2010). An alternative theoretical model to assess donor aid channelled through NGOs is the neo-functionalist approach of capacity building. This evaluates the impact of assistance in terms of the augmentation of the functional capacity of recipients. The extent to which donor assistance empowers and enables NGOs to perform various functions and tasks such as policy development or service provision determines the usefulness and success of the external assistance. This model does not inquire into the direct effects on civil society, but sees civil society as a way to improve the general democratic capacity of a political system (Carothers and Ottaway 2000). As a conceptual framework, it provides those studying post-authoritarian states with a set of benchmarks for monitoring change and progress and for building institutional and policy frameworks, while at the same time acknowledging the impact of constraining legacies from the immediate past. Conceptualising and quantifying terms such as impact, change, or capacity is problematic within this approach. Moreover, these technocratic terms are often used to avoid the same criticism expressed towards the liberal model: civil society is merely perceived as a tool to implement external, generally Western, and programmes.

Examining civil society assistance in terms of developing good governance shifts attention away from the impact on NGOs themselves, and towards the interaction between state and non-state actors, formal and informal actors and institutions, and the partnerships that emerge between them. From a governance vantage point, the impact and effectiveness of aid is judged on the extent to which it generates engagement between the state and non-state sectors and whether it sparks interaction between diverse actors as the basis for good and inclusive decision-making (Fagan 2010). Thus, it is crucial to define governance, as it is a topic which has spawned an extensive and lively field of research over the last years.

The concept of governance has seen a tremendous dissemination in the social sciences and an according multitude of interpretations. Put briefly, as an antithesis to government, it reflects a transition from centrally led government to a more open, inclusive, voluntary, and horizontal model. In the specific case of the EU, this notion replaces the traditional supranational model of binding EU law for a model that underlines the importance of soft, weakly institutionalised forms of policy-making in formal and informal networks and agencies (Lavenex 2008).

This concept of governance has been introduced to study EU external relations, especially in the case of the ENP. The ENP is seen as an attempt by the EU to externalise its own system of governance beyond its borders and to make its immediate vicinity more like itself (Gänzle 2008). This system of governance is characterised by multi-level and multi-actor constellations. As a *sui generis* polity, the EU cannot rely on traditional representative channels of democracy alone: one of the key elements in the EU's claims to effective and democratic governance comes from the inclusion of civil society organisations. Compared to the earlier success of enlargement with its conditionality and the golden carrot of EU membership, the ENP offers the EU less direct ways to influence democratisation in its neighbourhood. An alternative model is one for which Freiburg et al. (2009) coined the term the "governance model of democracy promotion". In this model, democratisation takes places unintentionally through functional cooperation between the EU and administrations in non-member states, creating a "back door" for democracy promotion by the EU.

Identifying opportunities

In order for this governance model of democracy promotion to work, there has to be such a "back door", and it needs to be used by certain actors. Democracy promotion does not cover the programmes specifically targeting civil society, but through the model of governance it also works

indirectly by including NGOs. Non-state actors can use political resources provided by the EU to promote domestic change, even in areas where there is no clear EU policy or law-exerting pressure from above (Sudbery 2010). Hence, the EU becomes a means of empowerment for these actors, strengthening the opportunity structure available to them. The concept of opportunity structures originates from Kitschelt (1986), who defines them as “specific configurations of resources, institutional arrangements and historical precedents for mobilisation”. This article specifically poses the following question: have the policies of the EU transformed the political environment for Georgian NGOs, thus altering the opportunity structures available to them? In this framework, civil society organisations are not the objects of a deliberate democracy promotion policy by the EU. Rather, they actively make use of the pressure for adaption caused by the rhetorical support for the democratisation agenda by both the EU and Georgian government. This fits in the governance model of democracy promotion, which is typical of the European model of governance, which is characterised by multiple networks between various actors at different levels.

Although this is a unique feature of the EU, the case of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) may exemplify the underlying principle. The Helsinki Final Act of 1975 signed by all states participating in the CSCE established a number of basic principles including respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Analysts at the time were sceptical about the chances that this would change the repressive nature of the communist regimes. However, as described by Daniel (2001), the commitments made by the communist regimes in Helsinki quickly turned into a common banner for activists and dissidents who mobilised around them. This shows that norms and values may be adopted by non-state actors, leading to unintended outcomes. A similar mechanism may be occurring in the framework of the EaP in which both the EU and national governments have pledged to strive for democratisation, a vow civil society organisations can remind them of and hold them accountable for.

The policies of the EU may alter the existing opportunity structure and they may be used by civil society organisation to empower themselves at the domestic level. Through different mechanisms, they might use the resources the EU offers them in a direct or indirect way. Literature on opportunity structures identifies a wide and diverse range of different specific resources and mechanisms. This article draws on the classification developed by Sudbery (2010) which identifies four main key resources the EU provides to non-state actors: funding programmes, policy instruments, arenas, and points of reference (Table 2).

First, funding for projects and network creation provides NGOs with the opportunity to access financial resources. Besides the financial aspect, this also increases their experience and capacities, creates network opportunities and strengthens their legitimacy empowering them through *capacity building*. Second, the PCA, ENP, and EaP and related agreements have led to a multitude of commitments made both by the EU and by the national government. Although these may not be binding, they create the opportunity for NGOs to hold both parties accountable. Through the *watchdog* mechanism, NGOs are empowered to promote and monitor the domestic

Table 2. EU resources.

Set of EU resources	Nature of resources	Mechanism of empowerment
Funding programmes	Material	Capacity building
Policy instruments	Material	Watchdog
Arenas	Positioning	Boomerang
Points of reference	Symbolic	Framing

Source: Sudbery (2010).

implementation of the agreements made. Third, the *sui generis* nature of the EU, characterised by its multi-level and multi-actor set-up, offers NGOs new arenas through which they can pursue their goals. The EU itself, lacking the traditional representative channels of democracy of a nation state, actively attempts to involve civil society organisations in policy-making to strengthen its claims regarding effective and democratic governance (European Commission 2001). Besides the official connections with the Commission or External Action Service, other channels such as the European Parliament or transnational advocacy networks and NGOs working on the European level are potential channels for interaction. Organisations are thus no longer bound by the limits of the domestic political arena; when they are confronted with an unfavourable domestic opportunity structure, they can take their claim to the supranational level. This is what Keck and Sikkink (1998) termed the *boomerang* mechanism. Fourth, the EU might be used as a point of reference to alter domestic discourse. NGOs could refer to EU's policies, standards, norms, and values to legitimise their own agenda through the *framing* mechanism. Exactly how these mechanisms are being applied by NGOs depends on the sector in which they are active, the availability of EU policies, and agreements in that sector, and the prevalence of a clear pro-EU discourse on the matter at the domestic level.

Empowerment through the ENP

Compared to other countries such as the USA or international organisations and NGOs, the EU only became active quite late in the field of democracy assistance in Georgia. Before the introduction of the ENP Action Plan in 2006, the EIDHR was the main instrument specifically targeting civil society organisations. The average yearly budget dispersed to Georgian NGOs is slightly over 1 million euros; the latest numbers on the EIDHR 2011 call for proposals amount to 1.2 million euros distributed over 14 different organisations (Delegation of the EU to Georgia 2012). The ENP itself does not entail specifically earmarked funding for civil society organisations. The ENPI budget 2007–2010 apportions 31.5 million euros to “support for democratic development, rule of law and governance” out of a total of 120.4 million (European Commission 2006a). In comparison, the US total Foreign Operations Appropriated Assistance budget over the same years totals 844.28 million dollars of which 104.32 million goes to “Governing Justly and Democratically” (Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs 2010). This shows that in both policy budgets the general goal of democratisation and state building accounts for about 26% of the total budget and that the USA remains a bigger spender on these issues even when the financing of the EIDHR is included in the budget of the EU.⁴ As a result, the ENP has only led to a very limited increase in funding resources for NGOs and therefore empowerment through *capacity building* has not significantly been the case for Georgian NGOs. The only potential opportunity for direct financing of NGOs is when they successfully apply for EIDHR funding with a proposal linked to the ENP. In the 2011 EIDHR call, this is the case for one project about increasing participation of civil society in the ENP monitoring process drafted by the NGO Green Alternative (Delegation of the EU to Georgia 2012).

The launching of the ENP led to a number of key policy papers and reference documents as described above. This opened up room for civil society organisations to take on the role of *watch-dogs*. After the implementation of the ENP Action Plan in 2006, a consortium was created that brought local civil society organisations and international organisations together to observe the implementation of the ENP. A number of reports and recommendations were published during the different stages of drafting, signing, and implementing the Action Plan. Through regular follow-up of the topic, these organisations tried to get the voice of civil society heard. Some 70 civil society organisations produced a list of recommendations for the Georgian government in 2005 with support from Open Society, the Heinrich Böll Stiftung, and the Eurasia Foundation

(Open Society Georgia Foundation/For Transparency of Public Finances 2007). Although this list did not directly materialise into formal involvement of civil society in the ENP Action Plan policy drafting, it raised interest in the subject among NGOs. The aims set for the organisation were further cooperation between civil society organisations, the political elite, the media, and other interest groups through intensifying debates and discussions about the ENP. The years following the establishment of this network, the activity and output dwindled and no formal follow-up of the programme was produced. Monitoring the implementation of the ENP was also hampered by the lack of clear-set goals or benchmarks in the Action Plan. The Georgian government, for its part, had initially developed a detailed matrix covering all the necessary changes needed in different policy domains, but this was dismissed later on as being too detailed. Instead, it was replaced with a limited working paper of merely eight pages (Author's interview with government official, Tbilisi, November 2007). A survey conducted among the members of this first ENP monitoring initiative (Project on Civil Monitoring of European Neighborhood Policy Action Plan Implementation in Georgia 2008) revealed that only 11 organisations continued to monitor ENP-related issues after the initial report. The organisations that did continue stated that they were relying pre-existing expertise and that the ENP had not contributed much to increasing their capabilities or knowledge. The main reasons for the low number of NGOs persevering in the ENP monitoring were a lack of civil society institutional involvement both in relation to government and to the EU, the vagueness and scarcity of available information, and insufficient financial resources.

What is interesting in this case is the central role of international organisations: Open Society, the Heinrich Böll Stiftung, and the Eurasia Foundation played a central role in the creation of the network. They appear to have filled the void created through the EU's lack of financing or institutional involvement of civil society and the absence of a stable relationship between civil society and Georgian government. Through this international input, Georgian NGOs became more closely linked to the European level; the three organisations concerned are all active throughout the region and in Brussels. This is a limited case of the *boomerang pattern*; although the network started off relatively successful, the encumbering domestic situation caused it to peter out. Opening arenas on the European level may have been interesting for Georgian NGOs, which shows that domestic circumstances were preponderant in order for the ENP to be a useful resource for Georgian NGOs (Author's interview with NGO activist, Tbilisi, May 2010).

The same goes for the limited use of the *framing* mechanism by NGOs regarding the ENP. The lack of prospects for NGOs to voice criticism related to the norms and standards of the ENP to which the EU and the Georgian government had stated they would adhere strongly diminished the possibility of framing. Although the dominant discourse within Georgian politics is univocally pro-European integration, statements remained on a rather general level, not delving into the details of the ENP Action Plan. Combined with restricted access to mass media for NGOs, this meant that the ENP did not turn into an authoritative point of reference for Georgian civil society organisations.

The introduction of the ENP may have only offered a limited number of resources for Georgian NGOs, but there was an important impact of the ENP within Georgian civil society. Direct impact through funding and incorporation of NGOs in the institutional framework of the ENP remained low. The indirect impact was higher, with Georgian civil society organisations themselves actively using the potential resources through monitoring, network creation, and forging international linkages. The lack of institutional embeddedness of these initiatives, however, led to a decrease in activities and to less use of these resources over time. Hence, though NGOs may have the intention to make use of the resources, the eventual impact is limited if these resources are not situated in a facilitating environment. Facing low interest from the EU and from the Georgian government, the outcome of these initiatives remained largely unsuccessful.

Empowerment through the EaP

The EU aimed to enhance the existing relations with its six East European neighbours through the introduction of the EaP in 2009. The EaP addresses a number of new issues like visa liberalisation, Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Associations, and Association Agreements. All these efforts are a continuation of the underlying principles already underpinning the ENP: promoting democracy and good governance, strengthening energy security, encouraging people to people contacts, and supporting economic and social development. Institutionally, the EaP introduces a number of innovations that radically diverge from the ENP. Besides the existing bilateral relations between the EU and national governments of the six countries, multilateral forums are introduced where alternative modes of democratic participation are possible. The introduction of a dedicated forum allowing for input from civil society organisations from the EaP countries officialised the role of civil society within the framework of the EaP. The role of civil society and NGOs was described as crucial in providing policy input, following new initiatives and in holding governments accountable. They are perceived to be active actors in promoting democratic and market-oriented reforms based on shared values (European Commission 2009). The European Commission called for stronger participation of civil society and suggested that particular attention should be paid to the involvement of civil society in the EaP initiative. The result was the establishment of the CSF and civil society organisations being recognised as full-fledged partners within the EaP structures.

Initially, the introduction of the EaP did not entail specific budgets for civil society support or for increasing civil society participation in EaP-related issues. Only the necessary funding for holding meetings and setting up the CSF was provided for. This discrepancy between the official EU language of supporting further civil society engagement and the lack of appropriate funding made NGOs question the sincerity of the EU on the matter (Author's interview with NGO activist, Tbilisi, April 2011). Similar to when the ENP was introduced, international NGOs stepped in and allocated funds for related projects. In Georgia, the Open Society Foundation issued a call for proposals for NGOs wanting to monitor the EaP and raising awareness on the EaP. Eventually, six grants were distributed amongst Georgian NGOs. Only after the events of the Arab Spring in 2011 did the EU specifically earmark the sum of 22 million euros for the period of 2011–2013 (ENPI Info Centre 2011). This Civil Society Facility is part of the ENPI and is targeted at reinforcing the role of civil society across the region. The Facility is made up of three components: *strengthening capacity* of civil society to enable them to become stronger actors in driving reform at the national level and stronger partners in the implementation of ENP objectives, strengthening non-state actors through support to regional and country projects, and promoting an inclusive approach to reforms by increasing the involvement of non-state actors in national policy dialogue and in the implementation of bilateral programmes. Under the Polish presidency of the Council of the EU in the second half of 2011, the idea of a European Endowment for Democracy was proposed. Similar to the US National Endowment for Democracy, this organisation would act independently from EU institutions targeting political parties, non-registered NGOs, and trade unions. The Endowment was officially established on 20 December 2011 by the Council of the EU (Füle 2012), but further details of the initiative remain to be agreed on. Despite the generally shared view amongst EU members and within EU institutions that the EU needs a more proactive tool to foster democracy outside its borders, opinions differ about the specificities of the Endowment and its relations with other EU institutions and instruments. In its current proposed form, the Endowment would be non-partisan and managed “at arm's length” by the Commission, the Parliament, and the External Action Service (Rotter 2012). This shared responsibility would be further complicated by the overlap with regional policies such as the ENP and thematic instruments such as the EIDHR. Member states have also

questioned how the introduction of the Endowment would interfere with the activities of national democracy promotion agencies and foundations (Kostanyan and Nasienak 2012).

The EaP does not fundamentally alter the existing initiatives in the field of *monitoring*. There has not been an initiative to come up with an overarching network of NGOs working on monitoring the implementation of the EaP. Rather, the existing expertise present within certain organisations is applied within the context of the EaP when relevant. In the past, for example, the Eurasian Partnership Foundation has held a number of expert meetings and roundtables on food safety standards. This is one of the issues relating to EU–Georgia relations; in the framework of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade talks, Georgia needs to align with EU standards on the matter. In a number of fields, similar expert input about subjects related to the EaP, such as environmental policy or labour legislation, is taking place (Author’s interview with NGO activist, Tbilisi, March 2011). The EaP offers these initiatives a clear framework for referencing; the demands from the EU are clearly stated in most of these sectors which makes it easier to monitor implementation.

The creation of the CSF has institutionalised the *boomerang pattern* to a certain degree. It gives NGOs the possibility to bypass national government and directly address certain issues at the European level. Through yearly meetings, Georgian NGOs have the opportunity to interact with NGOs from other EaP countries and international NGOs. The CSF provides advice and opinions on the EaP policy, but it is still struggling to become a full partner in the EaP process next to EU institutions and national governments. Within the CSF, four Working Groups have been set up and are functioning to discuss issues related to the four Thematic Platforms of the EaP: democracy and good governance, economic integration, energy security, and contacts between people (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum 2011b). These four dimensions create new arenas for NGOs specifically working on these issues, thus offering them new resources for empowerment.

The EaP also opens up extra room for *framing*; it explicitly lists a number of necessary changes Georgia needs to implement in order to adhere to European standards and norms in a wide range of fields. This makes it easier for NGOs to hold government accountable and to overcome domestic reluctance to implement these new standards. Georgian NGOs have introduced framing in a number of policy fields, especially in those where EU demands are explicit and well defined. NGOs working on the issue of food safety standards have been explicitly referring to EU standards and the ENP and EaP frameworks in their communications with Georgian government and civil society partners (Georgian Civil Society Organizations and Experts 2012) in order to legitimise their demands and put pressure on government to introduce the required changes.

In addition, linked to the CSF, a NP was created. It is a network of NGOs within Georgia who have shown interest in working on the issue of the EaP; about 80 organisations are currently active within the NP. It recreates the institutional set-up of the CSF at the domestic level and supplies the multilateral CSF with expertise and knowledge about Georgian domestic issues and events. In the first year of its existence, the NP has mainly focused on setting up the necessary structures to operate and on preliminary internal discussions on the role and future of the project. The first goal was to draw up common declarations, and to participate more actively and be visible in political and public debate within Georgia (Author’s interview with NGO activist, Tbilisi, May 2011).

A survey amongst the members of this NP was carried out in June 2011 and yielded the following results (Electronic survey distributed among members of the NP by the author 2011). Over 75% of the respondents described their organisation as a domestic Georgian organisation. This refutes the criticism that international NGOs form the backbone of the NP and that there is no interest from within Georgian civil society in EU-related topics. Another often-voiced criticism

is that NGOs are highly dependent on funding from the EU. This contradicts the idea of civil society being independent from political actors and would limit the scope for an autonomous and critical position for NGOs. Less than half of the members of the NP however have received funding by the EU during the last six years, which puts the EU in the middle bracket of international donors for NP members. Only 12% of them claimed that they had not received any international funding, which does validate the criticism that Georgian NGOs rely heavily on international support. However, this is not limited to the NP or specific for the Georgian case and is rather typical for post-soviet civil society. The members of the NP consist of two-thirds of organisations that were already working on ENP-related matters. This shows that the EaP has attracted new interest among NGOs formerly not working on EU-related matters. The main interests for joining the NP are putting pressure on government (59%), increasing leverage through cooperation (59%) and networking with other NGOs (56%). In terms of networking, contact with domestic and international NGOs is perceived as the most robust while contact with the EU through its local delegation and in Brussels comes second. Most respondents described relations with Georgian government and parliament as “non-existent”. Clearly, the NP manages to create new dynamics within Georgian civil society and its links with the EU while at the same time failing to create substantial ties with domestic political institutions. This is reflected in how NGOs perceive the role they can play: the majority of respondents do not see any possibility to be actively involved in law drafting, decision-making, or implementation of policies. As a result of the non-interaction with government or parliament, they confine their role to monitoring and acting as watchdogs.

Relations between the EU and Georgia have noticeably gone through a process of intensification. A first phase was characterised by mainly bilateral meetings, whereas the introduction of the EaP led to the establishment of various multilateral institutions. The EU appears to have managed to create an institutional set-up that would allow for a network mode of governance. Moving beyond the bilateral framework typical of earlier enlargement through a hierarchical mode of governance, the ENP, and EaP have led to the creation of institutions that aim to include actors such as parliaments or NGOs. The creation of a dedicated CSF and the linked NP has been the major achievement of the EaP regarding the creation of resources for NGOs. As one NGO member (Author’s interview, Tbilisi, March 2011) put it:

the EaP truly signals a paradigm shift from the part of the EU. Whereas the ENP was an enlargement light policy at first, the EaP has introduced new forms of cooperation and interaction. The EU acknowledges the benefits of having another channel to communicate with, apart from national governments. Civil society becomes a partner to talk with within the EaP.

A balance is needed between the spontaneous bottom-up demands and pressure from civil society organisations from the EaP countries and the top-down creation of official bodies and structures (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum 2011a). The EU has managed to establish the CSF and NPs which allow NGOs to make use of the opportunities of the ENP and EaP. By doing so, an institutional framework making a governance model of democracy promotion possible has been created.

The EaP and Georgian politics

The Rose Revolution not only toppled the old regime and brought the leader of the protesting movement to power, but it also extensively altered Georgian links with international partners. During the years leading to the revolution, ties between Georgian NGOs and opposition politicians and foreign governments and organisations had been close. Western donor organisations,

media, and politicians went along with the idea that the change of government signalled the success of democratisation (Areshidze 2007). As a result, their attention shifted from supporting NGOs and potential voices of dissent towards supporting the state-building measures of the government. Saakashvili's rhetoric on democratisation gave the impression that this democratisation could be implemented top-down. The growing concentration of power in the hands of the president and the violent break-up of protest in November 2007 came as a shock to foreign supporters of Saakashvili's government.

This close link with Western international actors did not mean that Georgian politicians were able to act as they pleased. On the contrary, Georgia's ambitious goals regarding integration in both the EU and NATO constrained room for manoeuvre. If the Georgian government wanted to remain a credible partner for these institutions, it had at least to appear to remain true to the promises made regarding democratisation. The support from these international partners is crucial to maintain domestic legitimacy. Both the November 2007 crackdown on protests and the August 2008 war with Russia have diminished initial Western optimism about the style of government of Saakashvili. This has prompted the government to implement a number of changes to, at least superficially, democratise the political system (Author's interview with NGO activist, Tbilisi, April 2011). This international pressure has helped to avoid the recurrence of large-scale violence and encouraged government to take into account a number of demands from the opposition. As a result, foreign and domestic issues became strongly interrelated, signalling the strengthening of the model of governance typical of the EU. The ENP, and later EaP, have been strongly instrumental in this: they offer the Georgian government an explicit guarantee of continual EU engagement. At the same time, they offer other actors resources to bypass government or put pressure on it, as described above. The introduction of the European level supplements the national political arena that is characterised by highly polarised relations between government and opposition.

The introduction of the ENP has only had limited effects on political realities within Georgia. Although Georgian government still pays lip service to the goal of European integration, other models are being discussed. The central question behind this is whether it is in the benefit of Georgia to implement the necessary and often costly changes to be in line with the EU's norms and requisites or whether a more liberal approach would be more beneficial. President Saakashvili has referred to other models like Singapore, Dubai, or Hong Kong in the past (De Waal 2011), implying that modernisation and further liberalising the economy are of greater importance than putting effort to adhere to EU demands. What is interesting to see is that this discussion has crossed over into Georgian civil society. Shortly after the NP was set up, an alternative organisation called Coalition for the European Georgia was created. This is also a network of Georgian NGOs, but their manifesto stresses the importance of freedom and liberty and explicitly does not refer to the EU (Coalition for the European Georgia 2011). Although there is an overlap regarding membership between the two networks, there is a clear ideological difference between the two. The Coalition is in favour of a more liberal approach, whereas the NP is overtly linked to the EaP and thus the EU. One of the initiators of this coalition explained,

we wanted to set up an alternative to existing so called civil society organisations. These organisations claim to represent the people, but in fact they are running a business, one which is almost completely depending on the EU for income. We wanted to show that there are other voices within Georgian society who are critical towards the EU. (Author's interview with NGO activist, Tbilisi, May 2011)

This demonstrates that Georgian civil society is to a great extent characterised by the same ideological divide as the general political debate in Georgia. The introduction of the EU level has not led to the creation of a field for discussion transcending existing divides within Georgia. The ENP

and EaP may have offered NGOs resources for empowerment, but they have not succeeded in reforming existing political divisions in Georgia.

The reluctance of Georgian government to increase its involvement in this model of governance and its persisting lack of constructive relations with NGOs show the limits of the EU's model of governance. If one of the actors involved does not voluntarily participate, the EU's model of governance loses much of its effectiveness and credibility. How the EU should entice reluctant actors to cooperate without resorting to traditional means such as conditionality remains an open question. This shows that the EU's model of governance only works when all partners involved are willing to cooperate. Outside its borders, the EU loses part of its power and attractiveness and it will have to adapt to this situation in order for its mode of governance to remain credible and workable.

Conclusion

The EaP has led to increased opportunities for NGOs in Georgia and it has given them new means and ways for empowerment. Compared to the accession process, the EU clearly has less direct impact on imposing or supporting democratic change within third countries. The lack of membership perspectives severely limits the effectiveness of conditionality, and the Partnership countries are generally characterised by less democratic political systems. This article argued that the Partnership cannot be assessed through the often applied Europeanisation-through-conditionality framework. Instead, this article looked at the EaP through the perspective of spreading the EU's network mode of governance outside its borders and how this has effected democracy promotion. This has led to increased opportunities for NGOs, which have made use of these opportunities in different ways. The eventual impact of the EaP on NGO empowerment has been strongly influenced by how the other actors involved, in this case the EU and Georgian government, have recognised the role of NGOs.

The introduction of the ENP, and subsequently the EaP, has institutionalised and intensified relations between the EU and Georgia. Whereas the ENP mainly consisted of bilateral relations between the EU and Georgian government, the EaP has been incrementally opened up for NGOs, particularly through the creation of the CSF. Georgian NGOs have made use of the opportunities this has offered them in different ways. In a first phase, during the mainly bilateral ENP, Georgian NGOs attempted to play the role of watchdogs. The lack of institutional framework, financing, and responsiveness by the EU and Georgian government limited the impact of their efforts. In a second phase, Georgian NGOs were offered a place within the framework of the EaP; the CSF and NP institutionalised the role of NGOs to a high degree. This has led to increased opportunities for NGOs for empowerment, which have actively been used by these NGOs. However, the reluctance of the Georgian government has prevented NGOs from playing a more proactive role outside of the CSF and NP, severely hampering the EU's impact on possible democratisation within Georgia.

This article has shown that, although in a limited way, the EU manages to have an impact on the empowerment of NGOs in Georgia. This does not happen through the same mechanisms as during the accession process, but rather through more diffuse and indirect ways because of the governance model of democracy promotion of the EU. Based on this research, the limits of this approach become noticeable, as there are certain variables which mitigate the eventual impact of the EU. First, opportunities need to be institutionalised to a certain degree. Without this institutionalisation, NGOs operate in a vacuum and do not manage to make an impact on the policies concerned or on the broader political context. This was the case with the ENP and the EaP's CSF and NP have addressed this to a large degree. The key issue then is to find the right balance between involving NGOs in policy-making and the institutions of the EaP and

respecting their independence. Second, the EU does not have the instruments or power to coerce the Georgian government to participate in these same institutions or to engage in constructive relations with civil society actors. The wider impact of the EU on democratisation within the domestic Georgian political setting is very limited. The network mode of governance appears to be less suited to deal with uncooperative actors. In a region characterised by regimes ranging from unconsolidated democracies to authoritarianism, this curtails the impact of the EU's democracy promotion efforts and raises the question whether this network mode of governance will be sufficient to promote democracy in the EU's neighbourhood.

Notes

1. The term "colour revolution" is loosely applied when describing different forms of popular protest in authoritarian regimes in the beginning of the twenty-first century. Although all cases share similar traits, there is no single template for all of them. The most cited examples are the three post-soviet cases of Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), and Kyrgyzstan (2005) which all led to the ruling presidents' resignations. For their part, these shared traits with events in Serbia in 2000 and earlier in Bulgaria, Slovakia, and Croatia. Important for this article is that in all cases civil society organisations which had enjoyed international support have been active in the protests.
2. About 900 km lie between the westernmost part of Georgia and the most Eastern part of the EU (the Northern Black Sea shore of Romania). The westernmost part of Georgia is Abkhazia, which is currently not under the control of the government in Tbilisi; another 100 km needs to be added when excluding Abkhazia from this geographic exercise.
3. It is important to note that the EaP does not replace the ENP, but is intended to reinforce it. Whereas the ENP also included countries from North Africa and the Middle East, the EaP only includes countries from the Eastern neighbourhood of the EU. Another caveat is the non-participation of Belarus in the ENP while it is part of the EaP. Furthermore, the ENP's funding instrument (ENPI) is also used to finance the Strategic Partnership with Russia which does not take part in either ENP or EaP.
4. These numbers only serve as an indication as to how important democratisation is for both actors; specific and detailed data on financing regarding civil society is not available. The necessary caveats are in place here: besides these formal allocations, both actors have other sources of funding that may affect civil society but are not included in the respective policy instruments described here. The August 2008 war has also led to a sudden increase in budget allocated to Georgia by both actors making it hard to distinguish between allocated money in their anticipated budgets and post-war assigned help.

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